Dr. Alexander Fursenko is a member of the presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the academic secretary of its History Division. A 1951 graduate of Leningrad State University, he earned a postdoctoral degree at the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, ultimately becoming a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, specializing in U.S. history and international relations. Among his twelve books is One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964 (coauthored, 1998).

Yuri M. Zhukov is founding director of Bering Research, a Washington, D.C.—based consulting firm. He holds an AB with honors from Brown and is pursuing graduate studies at Georgetown University.

# NIGHT SESSION OF THE PRESIDIUM OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, 22–23 OCTOBER 1962

Alexander Fursenko Translated by Yuri M. Zhukov

n the night of 22 October 1962, Nikita Khrushchev\* arranged for all members of the Presidium<sup>†</sup> to be telephoned and summoned to a meeting. At about seven o'clock at night, Moscow time, all were asked to promptly report to the Kremlin. When the Central Committee's secretary, Frol R. Kozlov, then Khrushchev's right-hand man, was asked by deputy premier Anastas I. Mikoyan the reason for the emergency session, the former replied that "an important announcement is expected from [President John F.] Kennedy regarding Cuba."

According to official records, the session in the Kremlin commenced at ten o'clock at night, while it was still midday across the Atlantic.<sup>2</sup> The agenda before the Presidium was entitled, "On the determination of a position on further steps regarding Cuba and Berlin." Although no one yet had a clear understanding of what Kennedy was planning on announcing, Khrushchev had received information indicating that the president's address would be devoted to Cuba.

At a morning meeting with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, the resident chief of Soviet military intelligence (the GRU) reported that a large redeployment of American forces was taking place in the southern United States. In its corresponding cable to Moscow, the GRU also reported that "since morning in Washington there has been heightened activity among the most senior government and military authorities," a meeting had

<sup>\* 1894–1971;</sup> premier of the Soviet Union—formally general secretary of the Communist Party (1953–64) and chairman of the Council of Ministers (1958–64).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> The Politburo (Political Bureau, the standing executive group) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was known as the Presidium from 1952 to 1966.

been scheduled between the president and congressional leaders, and at noon it was announced that a televised address by Kennedy would air at seven o'clock in the evening concerning an important matter of U.S. national security.<sup>4</sup>

Three days prior, a leading American observer, Joseph Alsop, had argued in a New York Herald Tribune opinion column entitled "What Is More Important?" that the central focus of a future Soviet-American conflict would be Berlin, lambasting those "pre-election campaign orators"\* who "shriek of Cuba":

To consider Cuba to be more important than Berlin at such a moment, when in Berlin, in all likelihood, a crisis is headily ripening . . . is the same as making every effort to cure a patient's bursitis while paying no attention to his cancerous tumor. Cuba is sooner like bursitis—a disease that irritates the afflicted and brings him much discomfort. As is done with bursitis, it will likely need to be treated, perhaps even necessitating some radical measures. However, to complicate the critically dangerous Berlin problem by madly insisting on the immediate resolution of the situation in Cuba is not only irresponsible, but simply criminal.<sup>5</sup>

This article was sent to Moscow via a cable the same day, arriving on the desks of Kremlin leaders.

Despite his close ties to the White House, Alsop did not know at the time that a U-2 spy plane had just discovered Soviet missiles in Cuba or that top-secret meetings were being held day and night by the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExCom), a body created by President Kennedy for the purpose of developing a response to this Soviet challenge.

Soviet intelligence found itself in the dark as well. Even though the resident KGB official in Washington, A. S. Feklisov, had assured his superiors that he had four reliable informants in the highest echelons of the U.S. government, he received no word from them about this development and consequently was almost completely unable to keep Moscow informed. Neither he nor Dobrynin knew that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba in the first place. This secrecy was an important precondition of Operation ANADYR<sup>†</sup>; by narrowing as much as possible the circle of those who knew about its existence, its planners could more easily prevent inadvertent leaks of information. As a result, when he was invited to the State Department to receive the text of Kennedy's speech at six o'clock in the evening, Dobrynin did not yet know what topic the president would address, Berlin or Cuba. As suggested by their cables, GRU officials did not know either. "The press emphasizes," they reported, "that the reasons for this vigorous government activity are being held in the strictest secrecy. Plans are being discussed about possible new steps with regard to Cuba or Berlin."

<sup>\*</sup> Midterm elections were to be held that November.

<sup>†</sup> The Soviet code name for the 1962 plan to deploy ballistic missiles, medium-range bombers, and a regiment of mechanized infantry in Cuba.

## THE SESSION OPENS: WHAT WILL KENNEDY SAY ON CUBA?

Khrushchev, who knew of neither the photographs taken by the U-2 nor the secret ExCom sessions, understood that a potential leak of information would turn Cuba into an object of acute confrontation, irrespective of Moscow's extensive precautions. "It has become known," he stated in his opening remarks to the session, "that [Kennedy] is preparing some kind of address." The General Secretary cited a report from the Soviet news agency TASS that "in the area of the Caribbean Sea, U.S. naval vessels carrying infantry are massing." He named no other sources and promptly yielded the floor to the minister of defense, Marshal Rodion Y. Malinovsky, who had been invited to the session to propose options for managing the impending crisis.

Having now received information through military intelligence channels that the topic of Kennedy's speech would be Cuba and having assessed the correlation of forces in that theater, the defense minister concluded that a "blitzkrieg" was impossible. "I don't think [the Americans] would be able to launch something right away," he said. "If an invasion of Cuba will be announced, then another day would have to pass [for the United States] to get ready." Malinovsky did not exclude the possibility that Kennedy's radio address would be a "pre-election trick"; in fact, the defense minister evidently wanted this to be the case. In addition, Malinovsky stressed that Soviet missiles had not been deployed to Cuba for the mission of a military assault on the United States, noting, "We have not striven to place the missiles on an hour's alert." The minister's remarks were followed by those of the General Staff's chief of operations, General Semyon Ivanov, who reported on the capabilities of military installations as envisioned under Operation ANADYR and on the movement of ships carrying military cargoes to Cuba.8

Having listened to the military briefings, Khrushchev agreed with his colleagues' conclusions. He remarked that a cable just received from Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko regarding meetings [in the United States with Secretary of State Dean Rusk] stated that "Kennedy was very cautiously formulating his thoughts on Cuba," while Rusk "had been drinking during the meeting and leading discussions about Berlin, insistently hinting at Cuba." Rusk had declared to Gromyko, "Cuba is to us what Hungary is to you." Rusk's words were a nearly verbatim repetition of a statement Kennedy had made to Alexei I. Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law and editor of *Izvestia*, during a meeting in the White House in early 1962. Khrushchev remembered this well and concluded that the coincidence could not have been unintentional.

Expounding his own position, Khrushchev asserted, "The heart of the matter is that we don't want to unleash a war. What we want is to cause a bit of a scare, to deter [U.S.] forces with respect to Cuba." In their own time, the U.S. did the same thing, placing a belt of missile bases around our country. That deterred us," he admitted. Hrushchev observed that the difficulty of the situation was that "we have not deployed everything that we wanted [and] didn't make public the agreement [on mutual assistance with Cuba]." Soviet ships had managed to deliver SS-4 (R-12) missiles, with a two-thousand-kilometer range, but the longerrange SS-5 (R-14) missiles were still en route. In sum, Khrushchev described the state of affairs as "tragic." He predicted, "They could attack, we would respond. This could spill out into a big war."

What solution could there be? Khrushchev suggested publicly announcing the USSR's mutual assistance treaty with Cuba. He asked himself, "How would the U.S. react to this?" In a first scenario, he anticipated that "they could announce a blockade of Cuba." Second, "[they could] commandeer our ships passing to Cuba." Third, Washington could announce that the United States "was not even thinking about attacking Cuba." Khrushchev now proposed to authorize, in the event of a U.S. invasion, a resort to emergency measures, up to and including the use of tactical nuclear weapons. "All forces are not to use tactical nuclear weapons in the opening phase," he ordered. "If there is a troop landing—[use] tactical nuclear weapons. As for strategic [weapons]—wait for orders." He then suggested sending the relevant instructions to the commander of Soviet forces on the island, General Issa A. Pliev. Having shared these thoughts with the Presidium's members, Khrushchev announced a five- or ten-minute break "so the comrades could think and express their opinions."

### PREPARING FOR THE WORST

By the time the meeting was readjourned, the deputy foreign minister, Vasily V. Kuznetsov, had reported that the U.S. embassy in Moscow was requesting a meeting with a Foreign Ministry representative an hour before Kennedy's address. Additionally, Defense Minister Malinovsky and the chief of the General Staff, Marshal Matvei V. Zakharov, announced that according to their sources—which evidently meant the GRU—ambassadors from NATO and South American countries were being recalled for consultations.

The discussion that followed took place in an increasingly tense environment. The official minutes provide only a glimpse of the session's actual proceedings. Mikoyan and Mikhail A. Suslov\* expressed deep concern about the situation that had developed. Khrushchev suggested that the Presidium discuss the text of the directive to be given to General Pliev. Malinovsky read aloud a draft directive, after which the nuclear question became the center of attention. Mikoyan spoke out pointedly against Malinovsky's proposed directive, arguing that it was fraught with the risk of war. In response, the defense minister was

<sup>\* 1902–82,</sup> leading party theoretician, a member of the Presidium since 1955.

forced to admit that "if nuclear weapons are to be used, then there are not that many of them on Cuba." He added that the Cubans themselves could be blamed for a first strike.

Khrushchev protested, "If we do not use nuclear weapons, they could capture Cuba." Malinovsky replied, "The forces that the U.S. has in the Caribbean won't capture Cuba." Khrushchev retorted, "The Americans could fire salvos from their missile carriers, without sending aircraft." Alexei N. Kosygin\* then entered the fracas (but the record of his comments is indecipherable). After Kosygin spoke, Khrushchev declared, "I forbid the use of nuclear weapons against Cuba," implying that the Americans would not be the first to use nuclear weapons. 17

While he objected to the view presented by defense officials, Mikoyan did not want—and was effectively unable—to challenge Khrushchev. The established tradition of deference to the general secretary prevailed, although the deputy premier disagreed with him. Mikoyan was categorically opposed to the use of any form of nuclear weapons. Khrushchev, meanwhile, believed that any other course of action was impossible. He then proposed that the crisis would be diffused if an announcement were made that "all the [missile] facilities are Cuban, and the Cubans declare that they will respond [to U.S. attack]." Mikoyan emphatically objected to this proposal, saying that if Washington recognizes that "the missiles are under our operational control, the Americans will understand that we won't be able to go on this adventure, since we know its consequences.... And if they find out that the missiles belong to the masters of the island, they will interpret this as a provocation, not ruling out that the Cubans could launch the missiles preemptively." Khrushchev agreed with this argument: "We'll leave the missiles as Soviet property, subordinate only to us." 18

The instructions drafted for Pliev, proposed by Malinovsky and endorsed by Khrushchev, stated that in the event of U.S. attack on the island, it was essential to counter—jointly with the Cubans—the aggressor "with all means." Mikoyan, noting that "with all means" implied an authorization to use nuclear weapons, raised the question of how one was to interpret the instructions: "So that means [one could respond] with missiles as well ... [causing the] beginning of a thermonuclear war?" Malinovsky, as Mikoyan recalled, "was not able to give an answer, since this ambiguity was an obvious oversight on his part." In Mikoyan's words, the defense minister "irresponsibly and unconditionally supported everything," never deviating from Khrushchev's positions regarding any form of military response to the Americans. 19

Indeed, if one recalls the insistence with which the defense minister had been seeking a decision in May regarding the deployment of missiles to Cuba, it

<sup>1904-80;</sup> at that time first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers; Khrushchev's successor as premier from 1964 until just before his death.

becomes apparent that the head of the military department was particularly hawkish and risk-acceptant in his reasoning, which became a source of conflict with proponents of a softer line—above all Mikoyan, whom Khrushchev regarded as a "Cuba specialist."

The official record of Central Committee Presidium sessions over Khrushchev's entire period in office shows that he and Mikoyan had frequent differences of opinion. Khrushchev could not stand objections but occasionally felt compelled to agree with his colleague. On this occasion it became necessary to soften the wording of the instructions. He asked Malinovsky to read "how the final directives to Pliev will sound."20 The text of the instructions was modified with a caveat that all means were to be used "with the exception of the assets of Statsenko [commander of the missile divisions] and Beloborodov [i.e., nuclear warheads]."

In an uncharacteristic display of caution, having read out the text and assessed the situation, Malinovsky proposed that the final instructions not be written in haste, preferring to wait and see what President Kennedy would say. In essence, the marshal was following the lead of Khrushchev, who had just hypothesized that the United States might either announce a blockade or not take any action at all, meaning that neither a bombardment nor an invasion of Cuba would follow. Malinovsky proposed to wait one hour, until Kennedy's announcement, and only then proceed with drafting detailed instructions. "Or otherwise," he said, "[the Americans] would be given a pretext to use nuclear weapons." All came to agreement on this rationale.

By the end of the night's discussions, Khrushchev too had softened his tone. He did not want to yield to pressure from Kennedy, who wanted, in his words, "to demonstrate his firmness." "It could not be ruled out," he reiterated, "that this is a bluff ahead of the congressional elections." However, practical considerations ultimately trumped emotions. Khrushchev was concerned about the heavy-lift ship Aleksandrovsk, which had been sent to Cuba with a cargo of nuclear warheads, and suggested that caution be exercised. "If we give Pliev the instructions [already approved and now being relayed to the General Staff by General Ivanov], we shouldn't make an announcement about the agreement [on mutual assistance with Cuba] now, since they may not hold back." The Aleksandrovsk, then in the approaches to Cuba, was given orders "to proceed to the nearest port." As a result, the vessel was able to evade U.S. pursuit and cross the quarantine line before the blockade was launched, entering the Cuban port of Mariel instead of the original destination of Havana.

At 1:15 in the morning, Kuznetsov delivered the text of Kennedy's address, which had just been received by the Foreign Ministry. Having read it, Khrushchev concluded, "It seems to me that according to the tone this is not a [declaration of] war against Cuba, but some kind of ultimatum." On this point it was decided to close the session and readjourn later in the morning.<sup>21</sup>

Khrushchev spent the rest of the night in the Kremlin. He slept, fully clothed, on the sofa in his office. The session resumed at ten in the morning, after Kennedy's address had been thoroughly analyzed. If the Kremlin had been dominated by an atmosphere of anxious suspense and alarm prior to the U.S. president's announcement, this morning the situation was radically changed. The previous buoyancy had returned. The Presidium approved the substance of the Soviet government's official response to Kennedy's announcement of a Cuban blockade; the Foreign Ministry drafted the resulting statement's text, sent it to the press, and broadcast it on the radio.<sup>22</sup>

## THE SUBMARINE QUESTION

During the day that followed, in a discussion of further actions regarding four Soviet [Foxtrot-class, diesel-powered] submarines sent to the region several weeks before, Defense Minister Malinovsky's proposals met fresh objections from Mikoyan. Malinovsky was not a member of the Presidium and was present only by invitation. Mikoyan spoke out decisively against the plan to send Soviet submarines to Havana,\* preferring to keep them outside Cuban territorial waters, at a distance of a three-day passage. In his opinion, the boats could be discovered rather easily while they were approaching the Cuban coast, inevitably resulting in a confrontation with the U.S. Navy, which would "worsen the situation even more and give rise to a serious conflict." Nevertheless, Malinovsky, having garnered the support of several members of the Presidium, insisted on sending the submarines to Cuba.<sup>23</sup>

During lunch, Mikoyan sat next to Khrushchev and tried to convince him to change his mind. "I thought about it a great deal," he said, "and believe that it is necessary to return once again to the discussion of the submarine question, because I think [my] suggestion was wrongly rejected." Khrushchev agreed, and the issue went back on the table. Malinovsky continued to insist aggressively that the submarines could "approach the shores of Cuba undetected." Mikoyan attempted to convince the members of the Presidium that the defense minister's suggestion was impossible and dangerous. However, his concerns were brushed off once again. The "Cuba specialist" decided to make one final attempt. He proposed to summon to the evening session the commander in chief of the Soviet Navy, Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov, with the apparent intention of exploiting the well known friction between the defense minister and the naval commander.

<sup>\*</sup> See Lyle J. Goldstein and Yuri M. Zhukov, "A Tale of Two Fleets: A Russian Perspective on the 1973 Naval Standoff in the Mediterranean," Naval War College Review 57, no. 2 (Spring 2004), esp. pp. 28-29.

Gorshkov, as Mikoyan later remembered, "very clearly showed on the map" that the proposed approaches to Cuba were exceedingly problematic for submarines, since the littoral region was shallow, sinuous, and full of small islands. In order to approach the island, the submarines would need to pass through a narrow strait, which was under radar surveillance by a U.S. naval base located on a nearby island.\* In other words, to cross this choke point covertly was impossible. Gorshkov suggested that the submarines be held two or three days from the island, which was precisely what Mikoyan wanted. Mikoyan, revolted by Malinovsky's incompetence on the issue, later recalled that the defense minister "was unable to raise any objections" to the admiral's assessment. Gorshkov, meanwhile, "proved to be of very great service [in preventing] the false move the defense minister wanted to make," enabling the deputy premier ultimately to outmaneuver the defense minister. In this quarrel with a Presidium member—and a skillful politician—Malinovsky was forced to concede.<sup>24</sup>

At last, Khrushchev authorized sending the four diesel submarines destined for Cuba to a point two days from the island. The full significance of this decision became known only in subsequent decades, when it was revealed that each had been armed with one nuclear-tipped torpedo. Due to numerous technical problems and deficiencies, the diesel boats were forced regularly to the surface, where they were easily—and repeatedly—spotted by U.S. antisubmarine forces. Recent eyewitness accounts indicate that only with great difficulty did the submariners avoid becoming engaged in armed confrontation. On returning to the motherland the participants of the submarine mission were awaited by neither honor nor reward. To the contrary, the commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, Marshal Andrei A. Grechko, pounced on them with the accusation that the boats, by rising to the surface, had allowed themselves to be discovered by the enemy; he declared that the submariners deserved court-martial. Admiral Gorshkov came to their defense, extinguishing the fury of the army leadership. Nevertheless, the identity of the submariners, who had exhibited uncommon endurance and bravery under the difficult circumstances of the Cuban missile crisis and successfully returned the boats to their docks, remained secret for

<sup>\*</sup> Referring generally to the transit of the Bahamas chain. In view of the short detection range of surface radar against a periscope or snorkel, the location of the U.S. bases, and the variety of routes available to the submarines, it is not clear to what Gorshkov might have been referring or why he gave such prominence to U.S. shore-based radar (as opposed to surface and air antisubmarine forces) as a threat. The editors are grateful for the views on this point of Capt. Joseph Bouchard, USN (Ret.).

<sup>†</sup> See John R. Benedict, "The Unraveling and Revitalization of U.S. Navy Antisubmarine Warfare," *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2005), esp. p. 98. See also Goldstein and Zhukov, and Owen R. Cote, Jr., *The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy's Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines*, Newport Paper 16 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2003), chap. 4.

many years. This issue entered the public domain only on the fortieth anniversary of the crisis; subsequently it received much attention in the press.<sup>25</sup>

#### WAS A NUCLEAR GREEN LIGHT EVER GIVEN?

The story of the night session of the Presidium of the Central Committee and the questions discussed therein would not be complete without mention of Khrushchev's attitude on the use of nuclear weapons. In the course of the meeting he made his position unmistakably clear. Although Khrushchev repeatedly both at the time of the crisis and afterward—emphasized that an attack on the United States was never the purpose of deploying missiles to Cuba, under the circumstances of the crisis he did not exclude their use as a means of defense. It is not difficult to imagine what would have been the outcome of such a course of action.

This question became a subject of debate and speculation after Khrushchev's death. At the 1992 Havana conference of participants of the Cuban crisis and scholars who had studied its history, General Anatoly N. Gribkov announced that the commander of Soviet ground forces in Cuba, General Pliev, was given the authority—in the event of an emergency situation brought about by U.S. land invasion and interruption of communication with Moscow—to use tactical nuclear weapons. This announcement became a sensation and was covered in world newspapers. However, Gribkov's revelation also provoked numerous questions at the conference, as well as much doubt. In support of his version of the story, Gribkov subsequently published a General Staff document containing the relevant instructions in his book on Operation ANADYR, coauthored with a U.S. general, William Y. Smith. At the bottom of the document were the signatures of Malinovsky and the chief of the General Staff, Matvei Zakharov.<sup>26</sup>

The Defense Ministry archives indeed have such an instruction on file, which had to be cosigned by the said individuals to have become official. However, the document was signed by Zakharov alone. Malinovsky did not place his signature on it, since the document had been sanctioned neither by the Presidium of the Central Committee nor personally by Khrushchev. In publishing this document, Gribkov failed to specify that the minister's signature was not on it, admitting to this omission in a Russian publication only a few years later. The general, however, insisted that Pliev had in any case received such authorization in the form of an oral order relayed through Gribkov personally, who arrived in Cuba three days before the beginning of the crisis.

Although the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the event of a U.S. invasion of the island was a possibility, it is highly doubtful that the Party's leadership would have delegated to the military the authority to make that decision. The Soviet system prohibited in principle such an option. Meanwhile, it was absolutely impossible that Malinovsky, who Gribkov said tasked the latter with orally communicating the orders to Pliev, could have done so without Khrushchev's official approval. For his part, Khrushchev, who at all times covered himself by diffusing accountability through "collective" resolutions, was unlikely to have resorted to such imprudent means. It is thus difficult to imagine that such orders affecting the fate of the world could have been relayed orally or, more importantly, come into force as the result of communication through any one person, however high a position he held. Not only under the Soviet system but in the framework of any system such a practice was unthinkable, whatever eyewitnesses may later claim. Neither archival documents nor the testimonies of the direct participants confirm that such a decision was ever made.

From the moment of Gribkov's arrival in Cuba in 1962 as part of the General Staff's delegation, he was continuously escorted by Pliev's deputy for combat training, Major General Leonid S. Garbuz. The latter has categorically denied that such an order existed or that its very possibility was even a subject of discussion. Garbuz, who had served in missile divisions since 1952, had other ways of knowing what Khrushchev's actual orders were. Prior to being dispatched to Cuba in mid-July 1962, he—along with General Pavel B. Dankevich, another of Pliev's deputies, who was initially to have led the group of Soviet forces in Cuba—was received by Marshal Malinovsky and then Khrushchev himself. "We have decided to slip a hedgehog under America," Khrushchev said, "to help Cuba, so America doesn't swallow her up." But the burden of his remarks, according to Garbuz, was that nuclear weapons were being deployed to Cuba exclusively as a means of "deterrence," not to be launched under any circumstances. Later this formulation was confirmed by written orders from the Ministry of Defense.<sup>27</sup>

The ambassador to Cuba at the time, Aleksandr I. Alekseev, has been just as categorical on this question. He was the most trusted Kremlin representative on the island and, as a member of the Military Council,\* would certainly have known of the existence of such an order. Alekseev recalled that Gribkov's assertion at the 1992 Havana meeting irritated Fidel Castro. The latter was present at all the conference's panel discussions but did not take the floor on this subject, since he was, in Alekseev's words, preoccupied with preventing denigration of the conduct of the Cuban leadership during the crisis. <sup>28</sup>

All that is known from archival documents and the memoirs of the participants demonstrates that Pliev was unconditionally forbidden to make any

<sup>\*</sup> The Main Military Council comprised the senior leadership of the Defense Ministry, reporting in wartime to the Defense Council, the supreme national-security decision-making organ.

<sup>†</sup> Castro had taken power in Cuba in 1959.

discretionary decision regarding the use of nuclear weapons. On 27 October 1962, via special cable, Malinovsky confirmed the ban on the use of any such weapon.<sup>29</sup>

## A SOLITARY VOICE OF RESTRAINT

Despite the fortunate fact that Soviet ground commanders in Cuba were not authorized to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of U.S. aggression, the minutes of the 22–23 October 1962 emergency Presidium session reveal a disturbing picture. A lack of actionable intelligence regarding deliberations within the Kennedy White House left key decision makers in the Kremlin uninformed and compelled to act on the basis of unsubstantiated worst-case scenarios. This made for a particularly volatile atmosphere, given the high profile of hawkish voices notably Khrushchev's and Malinovsky's-in the discussions. The debate over the wording of orders to be given to theater commanders on the use of tactical nuclear weapons is a clear demonstration of this precariousness. This volatility was confirmed further by even more ill-conceived and sometimes outright bizarre suggestions, such as Khrushchev's proposal to deceive the United States into believing that the missiles were under the Cuban leadership's command.

Another dangerous element that becomes apparent in the proceedings is an utter lack of understanding of naval matters—in part by Khrushchev but especially by the ground forces, which dominated the Ministry of Defense leadership. Only intervention by Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, the country's leading maritime strategist and the naval commander in chief, convinced the Presidium not to send the already-imperiled Soviet submarines on what in all likelihood would have become a suicide mission at best and the first salvo of a global nuclear war at worst. While the results of this decision not to send the Foxtrots all the way into Cuba were themselves less than rosy,\* the alternative would almost certainly have been perceived by the United States as a provocation, inviting unimaginable consequences.

In assessing this rare look at Soviet decision making during perhaps the most dangerous gamble of the nuclear age, it is hard to overlook the critical role played by Anastas Mikoyan. Through remarkable political maneuvering within a decision-making apparatus that eschewed differences of opinion, Mikoyan managed to calm the famously emotional Khrushchev and discredit the forceful, if obsequious, Malinovsky. Had this powerful, if nearly solitary, voice of restraint been absent from the emergency Presidium session, one would be hard pressed to conceive of a positive outcome to the Cuban missile crisis.

<sup>\*</sup> In that by 20 November all four had been detected by U.S. antisubmarine forces—see Benedict, also Goldstein and Zhukov.

#### NOTES

This paper was originally commissioned for a conference on the "Cold War at Sea," held 7-8 May 2004 at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. This article reflects the personal views of the author and not necessarily those of the government of the Russian Federation. The editors express their appreciation to Mr. Zhukov for his cooperativeness in preparing the translation.

- 1. Stenograph record of Anastas I. Mikoyan's memoirs, 19 January 1963. A. I. Mikoyan Archives, Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History.
- 2. Proceedings of the sixtieth session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 22-23 October 1962, recorded by A. K. Serov, Russian State Archive of Contemporary History.
- 3. Proceedings of the sixtieth session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 22–23 October 1962, recorded by V. N. Malin, Kremlin Archives, Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1954–1964 (Moscow: 2003), p. 617.
- 4. Residency of the Main Intelligence Administration Center (GRU), 22 October 1962.
- 5. New York Herald Tribune, 19 October 1962.
- 6. Residency of the GRU, 22 October 1962.
- 7. Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 8. Proceedings, recorded by Malin, p. 617.
- 9. Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 10. Proceedings, recorded by Malin.
- 11. Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 12. Ibid.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. The decision to send tactical nuclear weapons to Cuba was made by Khrushchev on 7

- September 1962, in reaction to an announcement by Kennedy threatening an invasion of Cuba in the event that a Soviet missile base was discovered there.
- 15. Proceedings, recorded by Malin.
- 16. Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 17. Mikoyan memoirs.
- 18. Ibid.
- 19. Ibid.
- 20. Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 21. Ibid.
- 22. See Alexander Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958–1964 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 247-48.
- 23. Proceedings, recorded by Malin. Kremlin Archives, Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1954-1964 (Moscow: 2003), p. 619. (In the original recording only 22 October 1962 is cited in the sixtieth proceedings. Serov's proceedings are dated 22-23 October 1962, which corresponds to the substance of the events' development.) Proceedings, recorded by Serov.
- 24. Mikoyan memoirs.
- 25. For a recent eyewitness account, see Ryurik A. Ketov, "The Cuban Crisis as Seen through a Periscope," Journal of Strategic Studies 28, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 217-31.
- 26. Anatoli I. Gribkov, General William Y. Smith, and Alfred Friendly, Operation Anadyr: U.S. and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis (Chicago: Edition Q, 1993), p. 183.
- 27. L. S. Garbuz, interview, October 1994.
- 28. A. I. Alekseev, interview, 15 November 1995.
- 29. Malinovsky, telegram to Pliev, 27 October 1962, Archives of the President of the Russian Federation.